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## THE SOCIAL CATHOLIC MOVEMENT IN FRANCE UNDER THE THIRD REPUBLIC<sup>1</sup>

Social Catholicism is not a new variety of religious experience; it is an application of Catholic principles to the economic and political problems of modern industrial civilization. What is now quite generally known as the Social Catholic Movement is a loosely-organized but very significant endeavor on the part of social-minded Catholics, the world over, to formulate a practical program of social reconstruction and to translate that program into action.

So rapidly has the movement expanded during the last half-century, that it may now be regarded as a force comparable to Socialism or to Syndicalism in magnitude and scope. It is similar to Socialism and Syndicalism in that it proposes to remedy the evils of poverty, of labor unrest, and of uncurbed competition; dissimilar, in that it preaches a message of conciliation rather than of class-conflict. In short, Social Catholicism ranks as one of the three or four really important international movements aiming at the radical modification of the existing capitalistic régime. Indeed, it has been described by a Socialist writer, and perhaps not incorrectly described, as "the only formidable adversary" of revolutionary Socialism.<sup>2</sup>

Because it is infinitely more influential, at present, on the Continent of Europe than in England or in America, the Social Catholic Movement has been almost ignored by historians writing for the English-speaking public, and its importance is not generally appreciated. The movement will undoubtedly play a larger role in American life during the coming years than it has in the past. Its career in this country is barely beginning—beginning auspiciously, one might add. We shall hear so much about Social Catholicism in the not very distant future, that perhaps a brief historical sketch and analysis of the better-

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<sup>1</sup> Paper read at the first annual meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association.

<sup>2</sup> HUBERT LAGARDELLE, in *Le Devoir social*, 1898, p. 81.

developed movement in France will have more than a purely academic and antiquarian interest.

There is a touch of romance in the opening chapter of the story. It is December of 1871. Walking nervously along one of the dimly lighted streets in the slums of Paris, a young army officer is bound on what he himself must have considered an extraordinary errand for a nobleman. He is about to make an address before a small assembly of workingmen. As he knocks at the door, he is still repeating to himself the carefully memorized phrases of his speech, for it is to be his maiden speech. A few minutes later, standing before the workingmen, his embarrassment drops from him, and he experiences an unaccustomed sensation, an exaltation of spirit, as though he had become conscious of the mission to which his life was to be devoted.<sup>3</sup>

That aristocratic young army officer, so bashfully making his first speech in public, was the late Count Albert de Mun, who is remembered today as one of the greatest orators of the Third Republic and as the father of the Catholic Social Movement in France. The movement may be dated from the year 1872, when de Mun, with the assistance of a few other prominent Catholics, began to found Catholic Workingmen's Clubs in Paris, in Lyons, and in other cities. Within three years, a hundred and fifty such clubs had been established.<sup>4</sup> As secretary-general of the organization, Count de Mun toured all France, speaking with an eloquence which kindled extraordinary enthusiasm. A bishop described him as "the orator of a new crusade"—a crusade to reconquer modern society for Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

At the outset, the leaders of the Association of Catholic Workingmen's Clubs seem to have had no intention of creating a new type of social and economic theory, or of formulating any very elaborate scheme of labor legislation. In de Mun's earliest speeches the historian may find expressed a zealous desire to enlist the support of the upper classes in combating Socialism and reviving religion among the workingmen; one may also find occasional hints that the medieval guild system should be re-

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<sup>3</sup> The episode is described in ALBERT de MUN, *Ma Vocation sociale* (Paris, 1909).

<sup>4</sup> ALBERT de MUN, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

stored; but one searches in vain for a real program or a systematic social philosophy.

As the Association expanded, more rapidly perhaps than its founders had ventured to anticipate, the need of a definite social-economic doctrine became increasingly apparent. Glittering generalities about Christian fraternity, justice, and charity were no longer adequate. Consequently, the enterprise which had been launched as an organization for practical social work gave rise to a new development of social and economic thought. The guiding spirits of the Association of Catholic Workingmen's Clubs became the pioneers of the Social Catholic Movement in the field of theory.

The formulation of a detailed program was accelerated by the entry of Count Albert de Mun, the acknowledged leader and spokesman of the Workingmen's Clubs, into the Chamber of Deputies, in 1876. Quite naturally, de Mun soon began to take a conspicuous part in debates on labor problems, employing his eloquence in behalf of such measures as laws against child-labor, the prohibition of Sunday work, the limitation of the working day, and the recognition of the right of workingmen to organize trade unions—a right not legally sanctioned until 1884.<sup>6</sup> Endeavoring to keep pace with de Mun, the Research Council of the Association of Catholic Workingmen's Clubs grew more precise, and at the same time more radical, in its views regarding labor legislation.<sup>7</sup>

With the assistance of the Research Council, de Mun and his Catholic friends in the Chamber of Deputies were able during the years 1886-1889 to present a series of Bills dealing with labor conditions.<sup>8</sup> That the Bills were too radical to be accepted by the bourgeois Republican majority makes them none the less interesting to the historian. The program set forth in these measures represented de Mun's conception of expedient and indispensable reforms,—stepping-stones to better things. A fifty-eight hour week was to be established, for men as well as for women. All children under the age of thirteen, and girls under

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<sup>6</sup> See especially his speeches of June 12 and 19, 1883, in the *Débats*, pp. 1277 *et seq.* and 1356 *et seq.*

<sup>7</sup> *L'Association catholique*, vol. xi, pp. 247 *et seq.*, 294 *et seq.*; vol. xiii, pp. 122 *et seq.*, 244 *et seq.*, 347 *et seq.*

fourteen, were to be excluded from factory work. Women were not to be employed at night, or underground, or in unhealthful occupations, or for heavy labor, or more than fifty-eight hours a week, or during a period of four weeks after confinement. The workingman was to be insured against old age, sickness, and accident. The right of labor to organize unions was to be recognized without the reservations hitherto insisted upon. Every encouragement was to be given to the formation of arbitration and conciliation boards, mixed unions of workingmen and employers, and other institutions tending to draw labor and capital closer together. Possibly these items may appear conservative to the present generation. Thirty years ago they were regarded as dangerously radical by the average respectable politician. De Mun was in advance of his times.

The ideal which de Mun and the Research Council envisaged as their goal was not State Socialism, nor was it the combative type of trade-unionism, which at best can do nothing more than extort concessions from unwilling capitalists. De Mun hoped that a modernized form of guild organization could be devised which would embrace both capital and labor and reconcile their interests. Ultimately, the trade organizations or guilds would serve as agencies for the regulation of wages, hours and industrial conditions, as well as for the various branches of social insurance.

The Association of Catholic Workingmen's Clubs, of which Count Albert de Mun was for many years the presiding genius, might be regarded as the parent stem of the Social Catholic Movement in France. One of the earliest offshoots was the A. C. J. F. (Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française), an organization somewhat analogous to our American Y. M. C. A. At its inception the French Young Men's Catholic Association or A. C. J. F. was a national association with an impressive name, an ambitious program, and six members. It was formed in the year 1886 by a half-dozen youths to whom de Mun, the veteran leader, had unfolded his dream of a great army of young men, organized in local groups, united by a central committee, devoted to the high mission of reforming society in accordance with Christian principles. Enthusiasm is contagious. Within

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<sup>8</sup> Chambre des députés, *Documents*, 1886, p. 1073 *et seq.*, 1738 *et seq.*, 891 *et seq.* 1887, p. 903; 1889, p. 273; 1889 sess. extr., p. 270.

fourteen months the association had gained a thousand members; by 1903, thirty thousand; at the present time, its membership is probably more than one hundred thousand. The value of the A. C. J. F. to the Catholic Social Movement has been twofold. In the first place, it has been very effective as a recruiting-bureau for Catholic social workers. In the second place, it has done much to popularize the Social Catholic program. Unlike the American Y. M. C. A., the A. C. J. F. has consistently advocated a fairly comprehensive body of social and political reforms, such as the representation of family interests in municipal councils, the organization of trade unions, industrial guilds, and various measures of labor legislation which need hardly be itemized in this place.<sup>9</sup>

Another interesting line of development may be traced back to 1876, when a monthly review entitled *L'Association Catholique*<sup>10</sup> was founded as the organ of the Workingmen's Clubs. Devoting its pages to the scholarly discussion of social and economic questions, this review soon became an important factor in propagating Social Catholic doctrines. Gradually, the circle of its influence widened. In 1896 its editors persuaded the editors of other Catholic periodicals dealing with social questions to hold periodical conferences, with a view to harmonizing their programs. Out of the conferences of editors grew the Social Catholic Research Union, which, in its turn, proved to be the germ of a still more important organization, the *Semaine Sociale de France*.

As its founders conceived it, the *Semaine Sociale* or Social Week was to be a sort of migratory university for social research. Each year the *Semaine Sociale* offered a course of lectures by leading Catholic experts on social and economic questions. As the courses lasted only one week, and were held in a different city every year, a very large and scattered audience could be reached. The average attendance soon exceeded one thousand.

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<sup>9</sup> FR. VEUILLLOT, *L'Action sociale des jeunes: Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française* (brochure published by the Action Populaire of Rheims); A. Souriac, "Les Idées sociales de la Jeunesse contemporaine", in *La Réforme Sociale*, 1913, pp. 513-541.

<sup>10</sup> It subsequently severed its official connection with the Clubs and was taken over, successively, by the A. C. J. F. and the Action Populaire. In 1909 it was renamed *Le Mouvement Social*.

In 1913 it was fifteen hundred. Particularly significant is the fact that the clergy and the universities were usually well represented. When the cloth and the mortar-board unite behind a movement, the shrewd observer will look for interesting developments. The influence of the *Semaine Sociale*, says Étienne Lamy, has prepared even the most conservative Catholics to recognize the necessity and justice of labor legislation.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps Lamy is overly sanguine in his judgment. Occasionally some conservative raises his voice in protest against the tendency of the lecturers at the *Semaine Sociale* to criticize the existing economic order and to advocate labor legislation.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the *Semaine* is rapidly popularizing, among the clergy and among the intellectuals of the rising generation, a strongly positive and constructive conception of social reform. Its aim is to equip Catholic leaders not merely with general theories but with specific knowledge, to the end that they may be prepared for intelligent action.

Space hardly permits any adequate survey of the numerous other organizations which have contributed and are contributing to the progress of Social Catholicism in France. Employers' associations, Catholic trade unions, workingmen's gardens, welfare institutions, the busy information-bureau which is called the *Action Populaire*, and a host of similar enterprises must be passed over in silence in order that at least brief consideration may be given to the political and intellectual influence of the Social Catholic Movement.

Unfortunately for itself, the Social Catholic Movement was at first associated in political life with Monarchism. When he entered the Chamber of Deputies, in 1876, Count Albert de Mun took his seat among the reactionary royalists and became one of the most conspicuous opponents of the Republican régime. By so doing, he undoubtedly strengthened the Legitimist Pretender's cause, at the expense of his own. The bourgeois Republicans who were then in power regarded him as a

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<sup>11</sup> E. LAMY, in *Le Correspondant*, Aug. 25, 1909, vol. 236, pp. 625-653. The proceedings of the *Semaine Sociale* are published annually and are widely commented upon by French periodicals.

<sup>12</sup> For example, see EUGENE ROSTAND's article in *La Réforme Sociale*, vol. 58, pp. 606-612.

particularly dangerous type of Monarchist and Clerical, because he was so outspoken in his accusation that the Republic was deliberately refusing justice to the working classes. When, in the historic debate of 1883 on the Bill to legalize trade unions, de Mun appeared as an eloquent champion of the workingmen, the Republicans took him severely to task, insinuating that his declamations on the topic of social justice were merely a novel and insidious form of Monarchist-Clerical propaganda against the Republic.<sup>13</sup> A few of his fellow-Catholics in the Chamber of Deputies supported his efforts, but more distrusted him as a Socialist in disguise.

Under such circumstances, de Mun could gain but little support for any proposals he might have to make with regard to labor legislation. The Bills which he introduced during the years 1886-1889 were doomed in advance. Nevertheless, his efforts were not entirely bootless. The criticisms which de Mun from his side of the Chamber and the Socialists from their side were incessantly leveling at the bourgeois Republican majority had the effect of goading the latter to action, and thus, indirectly, promoted social legislation.

Such was the situation when Pope Leo XIII issued his Encyclical "On the Condition of the Working Classes", in 1891. Interpreting the Papal message as a clear vindication of their own principles, the Social Catholics were enormously encouraged and strengthened. The Socialist Lafargue publicly invited the Clericals to cooperate with the Socialists in ameliorating the condition of the proletariat.<sup>14</sup> An anti-clerical publicist, Eugène Spuller, frankly expressed his alarm at the manner in which the principles of economic individualism and capitalism were being assailed by both Marxian Socialism and, as he styled it, "Christian Socialism." Who could predict, he asked, what would happen if the Church should regain her hold on the masses by defending their economic interests?<sup>15</sup>

Thus far, the Social Catholics had been more or less seriously hampered by their connection with Monarchism. In 1892, however, Leo XIII issued a letter to the French people, exhorting

<sup>13</sup> See the *Débats* of the Chambre des députés for June 12-19, 1883.

<sup>14</sup> Chambre des députés, session extraordinaire, 1891, *Débats*, pp. 2487-2492.

<sup>15</sup> EUGÈNE SPULLER, *L'Évolution politique et sociale de l'église* (Paris, 1893), *passim*.



all Catholics to refrain from conspiracies against the Republican form of government in France.<sup>16</sup> Many Catholics, and among them Count Albert de Mun, now became *ralliés*, that is to say, ceased their efforts to restore the Monarchy and accepted the Republic as the existing and lawful government, though they might continue to cherish an intellectual preference for Monarchy. Henceforth, in public life, the Social Catholic Movement was no longer handicapped by alliance with the "lost cause" of Monarchism.

After a period of uncertain and shifting political combinations, there emerged in 1902 a new political party, the Action Libérale Populaire, which gave enhanced prominence to the economic program of the Social Catholic Movement. Jacques Piou, the founder of the party, could hardly have been called at that time a Social Catholic; his aim was to create a strong conservative party friendly to the Church and at least passively loyal to the Republic. It so happened, however, that the A. L. P., as the party is often called for convenience, drew into its ranks a number of Social Catholics, including Count Albert de Mun, who became vice-president. The Social Catholic members of the party alone possessed a positive social program, and their program was presently adopted by the party as a whole.

It would be interesting, were there no limitations of time and space, to follow the history of the A. L. P. in some detail, showing how its members voted on labor questions, analyzing the Bills they presented, and discussing their attitude toward Socialism.<sup>17</sup> Suffice it to say, that the A. L. P. has proposed a remarkable series of reforms, constitutional and economic, based upon Social Catholic principles. The party has grown in strength until it now has a larger dues-paying membership and a considerably larger delegation to the Chamber of Deputies than the Unified Socialist Party can claim.

Important as the A. L. P. has become, it is only a part of the

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<sup>16</sup> *Acta sanctae sedis*, vol. xxiv, p. 529; cf. Spuller, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-276, and Dabry, *Les Catholiques républicains* (Paris, 1905).

<sup>17</sup> For a less meagre description of the A. L. P. the reader may be referred to the chapter entitled "The Popular Liberal Party", in the author's forthcoming study of *The Labor Problem and the Social Catholic Movement in France* (Macmillan Co.).

Social Catholic Movement, and it does not represent the full measure of the movement's political influence. The Catholic vote has not been concentrated, and probably never will be concentrated, on a single party. Moreover, the members of the A. L. P., instead of continuing to sit as an isolated faction in the Chamber, have recently distributed themselves among various parliamentary groups, though still remaining loyal to their own program. Consequently, the influence of French Social Catholicism in the future will be discernible not so much in the growth of a separate party as in the penetration of several political groups by Social Catholic ideas.

Not in the Palais-Bourbon, however, nor in the Palais du Luxembourg, has the most important work of the Social Catholic Movement been accomplished, but, rather, in the lecture-rooms, the editorial offices, the private studies, where hundreds of professors, journalists, publicists, jurists, economists and priests have been engaged in the tasks of research, education, and propaganda. Ideas are the seed from which political achievements spring. The significant remark to make about the French Social Catholic Movement is not that it has had a considerable political influence, but that it has been prolific of ideas. It has been one of the important factors in breaking down opposition to labor legislation; in this respect, one might say, it has served as the ally of its enemy, Socialism. In demanding legislation against child-labor, the restriction of woman-labor, the shortening of the working day, the increase of wages, factory inspection, health insurance, accident compensation, old age pensions, and similar measures, it has anticipated and helped to accelerate the social program which the Third Republic has rather tardily and hesitantly carried into execution.

The measures just enumerated are regarded by Social Catholics as little better than palliatives for the disorders of a diseased economic system. One must go still deeper, if one would strike at the root of the malady. Count Albert de Mun and other Social Catholics have often declared that modern capitalistic society was suffering the evil effects of an un-Christian and materialistic doctrine of economic individualism. The conception of labor as a commodity subject to the law of supply and demand, the "iron law" of wages, the glorification of competition,

the opposition to trade-unionism, the reluctance to adopt social legislation, so characteristic of the nineteenth century, were part and parcel of this individualistic doctrine. What the world needed was a new social philosophy.

In their endeavor to supply a new social conception, the Social Catholics of France have placed great emphasis on the principle of association or unionism, a principle which they seek to embody in a modernized guild régime. The guild, as they conceive it, would be a kind of super-union, comprising all the different human elements concerned in a given economic activity, whether agricultural, commercial, or industrial. For example, an industrial guild would include capitalists, technical experts, managers, clerks, and laborers. Each class might be and should be separately organized in unions, but the guild council would form a bond of union, representing all the classes. To the guild council would be entrusted, at first, the prevention of industrial disputes, the regulation of working conditions, the supervision of sanitary conditions and safety-devices, and control of vocational training. It would take over from the central government the administration of accident compensation, health insurance, old age pensions. It would propose, criticize, sanction, and apply future factory legislation. Ultimately, it would be given a voice in a national assembly, a sort of guild congress or vocational senate (the French call it a *sénat professionnel*), which would share with the Chamber of Deputies the responsibility for national economic legislation. Such an organization, it is claimed, would bridge the gap between capital and labor; it would give the workingman a certain participation in industrial management; it would revive the old-time pride of craftsmanship; it would provide a delicate and responsive mechanism for the administration of economic legislation; it would lead society not into the perils of socialistic bureaucracy, but towards a new régime in which social justice could be achieved without sacrificing liberty. It is not the task of the historian to judge the merits of these claims. The historian may be permitted, however, to observe that whereas two generations ago the very mention of such ideas was sufficient to provoke sneers in the French Chamber of Deputies, today the guild philosophy is gaining ground, and not in France alone.

As the old economic individualism retreats, the position of the Social Catholic Movement changes. Many of the principles of which the Social Catholics were among the earliest and most insistent advocates have now received general recognition. In the Treaty of Versailles the representatives of twenty-eight nations solemnly affirmed the principle that "labor should *not* be regarded merely as a commodity or article of commerce", and in the same treaty the eight-hour day, the living wage, trade-unionism, and international labor legislation are explicitly approved in principle.<sup>18</sup> One could hardly ask a more impressive repudiation of economic individualism. The task of the Social Catholic Movement in France, therefore, will no longer be, primarily, to combat individualism. The period of negation is drawing to a close, and a period of social reconstruction seems to be at hand. In attempting to realize its own program of social reconstruction, the Social Catholic Movement will find itself opposed, one may venture to predict, not so much to the obsolescent doctrine of individualism as to the more aggressive forces of State Socialism, Syndicalism, and Bolshevism.

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<sup>18</sup> Article 427.